

County of Sonoma



Strategic Planning

Work Group Two:
Demographics, Growth, and Service Delivery



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Section 1: Introduction

Purpose

The Work Group was tasked with performing an analysis on the following issues:

Demographics and Service Delivery: How will changing demographics impact the way County government delivers services?

Growth and Carrying Capacity: How can the County, in concert with other jurisdictions, address issues that accompany growth and urbanization? These include infrastructure carrying capacity (transportation, water, housing), urbanization problems, and how to advance the “good of the whole” versus a competition among narrow interest groups.

The analysis focused on identifying demographic trends and conditions impacting Sonoma County (hereafter referred to as the County), assessing how they have affected County government services in recent years, and projecting how they are likely to affect the demand for government services in the coming years. As the work proceeded, assessment of the impact of these trends on the second issue – growth and carrying capacity – was picked up by other work groups analyzing similar topics.

Methodology

The Work Group began by compiling data from more than three-dozen documents and web sources, interviewing representatives from each department (usually including the Department Head), and contacting other experts. The Work Group then focused on three primary tasks. The first was to analyze the impact of the trends and conditions on each sector of County government. The second was to assess the County’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (a “SWOC” analysis) in light of the changing demographics and community conditions. The third was to create a set of scenarios of the future, describing Sonoma County as it would be, were done differently from the way the County and other jurisdictions operate today.

Work Group Members

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Section 2: Summary of Key Findings and Conclusions

This report presents the findings of Work Group Two, divided into two categories. The first includes demographic trends and other drivers of demand for County services. The second considers how these trends and drivers, as well as other factors unique to specific departments or programs, impact the County. This section is a high-level statement of the key findings. Section 3 provides in-depth analysis and supporting data.

1. Sonoma County will grow slowly but steadily. The County will become increasingly urbanized and have greater in-commuting, placing an increasing burden on County infrastructure (roads, water and wastewater systems, and solid waste disposal).

2. The over-60 and Latino populations will grow in proportion to the overall county population with implications for the nature of future County service delivery. Demographic projections for the two decades from 2000 to 2020 indicate that the over-60 population will increase from 16% to 27% of the county's population while the percentage between age 21 and 60 will decline from 56% to 50%. In 2010, more than 110,000 Sonoma County residents will be over age 60. This population experiences high rates of chronic illness and disability, and places a high demand on programs that serve seniors (for example, seniors are placing a growing demand on the In-Home Supportive Services program, which grew by 60% between 2001 and 2006).

The Latino population will also continue to grow rapidly. Latinos provide much of the workforce needed to fuel the County's economic growth, and are increasingly becoming homeowners and business and community leaders. Still, a significant number suffer the effects of poverty and rely heavily upon County services such as Medi-Cal and food stamps (for example, among Latinos, 20% are currently eligible for Medi-Cal versus 6% of the White^{*} population). Also, the Latino population is much younger than the Sonoma County average (the median age is 24 years versus 41 years among Whites). The dropout rate among Latino high school students is 17%, more than twice that of White students. This, combined with the growth in Latino gangs (see item 5 below), creates significant concern for the needs of Latino youth and indicates a potentially high demand for County services into the future. To serve the growing Latino population, all County departments that serve the public will have an increasing need for bicultural staff.

3. Low and middle-income families will continue to face increasing economic pressure as living costs increase but wages lag behind. The high cost of housing in Sonoma County, as well as nationwide increases in the cost of health care, health insurance, gasoline, and other necessities, is hitting low and middle income families particularly hard, given national statistics showing that their wages are flat or declining. This dual trend is eroding low and middle-income families' ability to afford to live in Sonoma County. It will also continue to drive an increasing demand for some County programs (e.g. food stamps and housing programs), and will negatively impact the County's ability to recruit staff.

4. Gang activity will continue to increase, placing a heavy burden on the criminal justice system. Gang membership continues to grow rapidly, particularly in Latino-identified gangs, placing an increasingly heavy burden on resources in law enforcement, the courts, and juvenile and adult detention facilities. For example, in just three years, the number of gang-conditioned sentences in Juvenile Court nearly tripled – from 145 to 385 cases between 2002 and 2005.

* In this report the term "White" refers to the White Non-Latino population demographic.

5. The County's high rates of alcohol and methamphetamine abuse will continue to have a major impact on the demand for County services. The prevalence of alcohol abuse in Sonoma County is indicated by the fact that the county's rates of the following all exceed statewide averages: fatalities from alcohol related traffic accidents, teen drinking and marijuana use, adult and youth admissions to alcohol and drug treatment programs, juvenile arrests for alcohol and other drug (AOD) offenses, school AOD offenses, and other indicators. A significant number of children in Sonoma County are born exposed to alcohol or drugs prenatally. Together, arrests related to alcohol and other drugs (AOD) constitute nearly half of the total bookings in Sonoma County detention facilities. This does not include other crime categories that are likely influenced by AOD, such as violent crime, property crime, and sex crimes. Other than alcohol, methamphetamine constitutes the greatest portion of the AOD problem. Methamphetamine use is the second most common primary drug – following alcohol – of abuse among those admitted for AOD treatment in Sonoma County, and that treatment contains a higher percentage of methamphetamine abusers than the state and national averages. Also, methamphetamine use prior to arrest is reported by 60% of the inmate population.

6. The demand for County services will increase at a far greater rate than County population growth in several program areas where there is a significant share of County costs. The increasing demand, in combination with the fact that the County is not fully reimbursed for the full cost of providing these services, creates significant challenges to the County's ability to maintain service levels. The six trends described above, along with other factors, combine to drive up demand and cost, particularly throughout the criminal justice system. The costs of Criminal Justice Services consume the largest share of the County's discretionary General Fund revenue, and while the County's population increased by 11% between 1996 and 2004, Criminal Justice Department costs increased by over 100% (though largely due to salary and benefits cost increases, see Work Group 1 Report, Finding 1). These increases are driven in part by rising gang activity, which has driven up the number of offenders per case, placing a greater burden throughout the criminal justice process (from arrests, to prosecution, to publicly-funded defense, to incarceration). Similarly, cost and service demands have increased dramatically in several Health and Human Services programs. For example, in-home care for people with disabilities and the frail elderly has grown from about 2,500 recipients in 2001 to about 4,000 in 2006 and the County's share of program costs nearly tripled during that time. Also, while foster care program caseloads have remained fairly constant from 2001 to 2005, the County's share of costs escalated from \$4.9 million to \$6.4 million, a 30% increase, driven in large part by a shift in funding from the federal and state levels to the County. While State funding offsets some costs in County programs, it falls short of the overall cost increases from year to year.

7. Sonoma County's social fabric will continue to trend toward greater diversity, leading to new challenges in service delivery and governance. While difficult to quantify, most experts agree that Sonoma County's demographic and social trends over the next five to seven years will increasingly move in the direction of both a growing elderly White population and a growing, younger Latino population. The opportunity to take advantage of this diversity and build a more cohesive community could positively impact the County's ability to develop a broad-based policy and programmatic consensus to address the issues and needs described above.

Section 3: Discussion of Key Findings and Conclusions

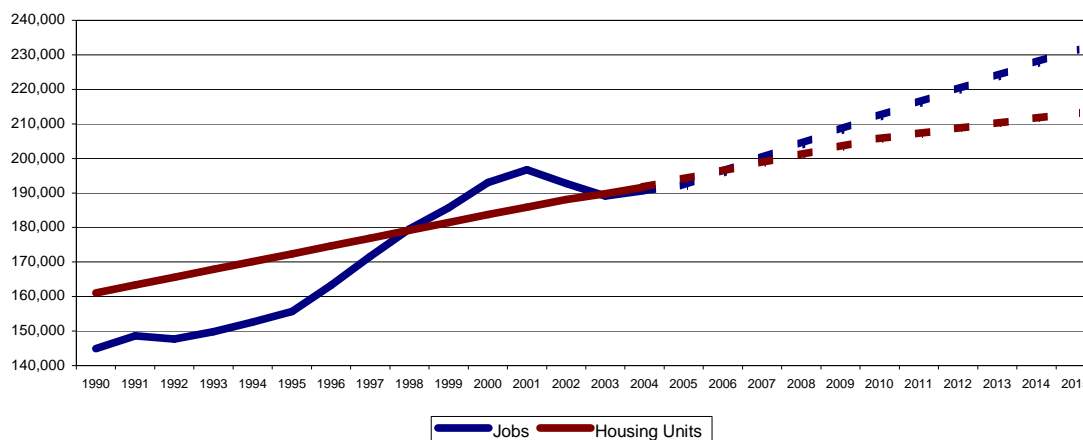
The following presents more information about each of the key findings and conclusions summarized above. The information includes data from numerous sources, as well as empirical observations from interviews conducted with experts in fields related to each topic (including County of Sonoma employees).

1. Overall Population Growth

Finding 1: Sonoma County will grow slowly but steadily. The County will become increasingly urbanized, and have greater in-commuting, placing an increasing burden on County infrastructure (roads, water and wastewater systems, and solid waste disposal).

Jobs-Housing Balance: Sonoma County has experienced a significant change over the past 15 years. In 1990, it was considered a “bedroom community.” There were fewer jobs than housing units (145,000 jobs and 161,000 housing units), thus Sonoma County was supplying workers to the rest of the Bay Area. Since the late 1990’s that has changed. Currently, the jobs-housing balance is about equal, but job growth continues to outpace housing growth, resulting in increasing commuting into the County.¹

The Number of Jobs and Housing Units in Sonoma County, 1990-2015 (Projected)



Slow, City-Centered Growth: Since 2000, housing supply growth in Sonoma County has been relatively slow, at about 1% per year, placing the County below average Bay Area and statewide growth rates. Countywide, about 2,000 housing units have been added per year, mostly in cities.² Looking forward, the vast majority of residential development will occur in the cities, often higher-density housing units located near retail businesses.³

Greatest Impact on County Services: New housing growth occurring in the cities has a high impact on the County, which provides services to residents in all areas of the County. The greatest growth pressure will fall upon County-provided infrastructure: water, wastewater, solid waste disposal, and local roads. Infrastructure needs are discussed in Work Group Three’s Analysis Phase Report.

2. Population Growth

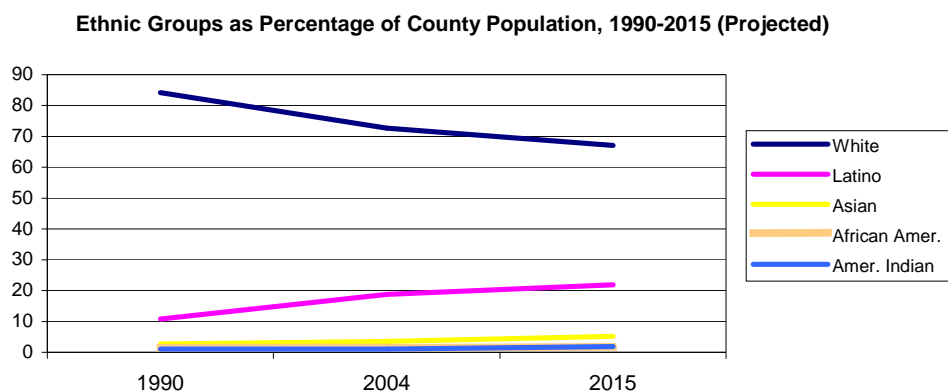
Finding 2: The over-age-60 and Latino populations will grow in proportion to the overall county population, with implications for the nature of future county service delivery.

The Over Age 60 Population: Demographic projections for the two decades (from 2000 to 2020) indicate that the over-60 population will increase from 16% to 27% of the county's population, while the percentage between age 21 and 60 will decline from 56% to 50%. In 2010 more than 110,000 Sonoma County residents will be over age 60.. This population experiences high rates of chronic illness and disability, and places a high demand on programs that serve seniors (for example, seniors are placing a growing demand on the In-Home Supportive Services program, which grew by 60% between 2001 and 2006).⁴ Overall, this generation is living longer than previous generations of older adults, and some continue working well past age 65.⁵ These seniors offer a potential pool of experienced workers, community volunteers, and caregivers for their elder relatives and grandchildren with working parents. However, many will be living with chronic medical conditions and age-related diseases (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, etc.). Among people over age 65 the rate of physical disability is 30%, whereas the rate for those under age 65 is 6%.⁶ As seniors move into their advanced years (particularly over age 80), an ever-larger number suffer from physical and mental conditions, and poverty and homelessness increase.⁷ During the five-year strategic planning horizon, a relatively small percentage of the population will move into the over-80 age bracket, but given the intensity of their need for services and the cost of providing them, they will have a noticeable impact on the County. This impact will increase significantly in subsequent years.

Among the total group of Sonoma County seniors, many will be long-term residents who own valuable real estate. Some among them will be on fixed incomes and will struggle to meet the rising costs of daily living and medical care. On the other hand, a growing number of retirees with significant wealth are moving into Sonoma County, and often place high expectations on the County to preserve the "country" atmosphere.⁸

Greatest Impact on County Services: The growth in the aging population is a significant contributor to the increasing demand for programs that serve seniors, in particular In-Home Supportive Services and Adult Protective Services. See Item 6 below (p. 10), which examines the demand on these programs in greater detail.

The Latino population will also continue to grow rapidly. As the following chart shows, the White Non-Latino population (hereafter referred to as "White") is declining as a percentage of the total population, while the Latino population is increasing. The Latino population in Sonoma County is projected to rise from about 11% in 1990 to 22% in 2015.⁹



From 2000 to 2020, Sonoma County's Latino population is projected to increase from about 80,000 people to almost 140,000. At the same time, the White population is declining as a percentage of the County's total population – from about 84% in 1990, to 73% today, to a projected 67% in 2015. The County's percentage of Asian, African American and American Indian residents is projected to increase very slightly over time.¹⁰

The average Latino household has 4.2 members, nearly twice the size of the average White household (2.4 members).¹¹ Latino population growth is driven by births more than in-migration. The median age among Sonoma County Latinos is 24.4, versus 41.7 among Whites.¹² In Sonoma County kindergartens, one-third of the students are learning English as a second language.¹³ The growth in the young-Latino population is particularly significant because the high school dropout rate among Latino students is 17%, more than twice the 8% rate among White students. Also, among students who do graduate, 43% of White students complete the courses required for admission to California's universities and colleges, whereas half as many Latino students (22%) complete these courses.¹⁴ This does not bode well for the future, since the unemployment rate among high school dropouts nationally is 7.8%, versus 4.8% for high school graduates and 2.4% for college graduates.¹⁵

Sonoma County's Latino population consists of two somewhat different subgroups – new immigrants, and Latinos born in this country. New immigrants provide the workforce to support many of the County's key industries (agriculture, tourism, etc.), but often earn low wages. As noted elsewhere in this report, these low-wage earners are experiencing economic pressure as the cost of housing, gasoline, health care, and other necessities increase. Some suffer from chronic illnesses and other conditions often associated with poverty, yet they have difficulty accessing care and treatment because of language, cultural, economic, and other barriers.¹⁶

First and second generation Latinos born in this country are increasingly joining the ranks of the middle-income sector. Their household incomes are roughly equal to the Sonoma County average¹⁷ (although as noted, Latino households have more members than the County average). Many own businesses and have attained leadership positions within the community.

Greatest Impact on County Services: County Departments that serve the public will increasingly need to become culturally competent. Most other County impacts will result from low-income and poverty-related issues, since language, residency status, and other factors cause a significant number of Latinos to experience economic hardship. This is illustrated by the fact that among Latinos, 20% are currently eligible for Medi-Cal versus 6% of the White population. Also, Latino gang membership is growing, as it is among other ethnic groups, as discussed in Finding 5 below.

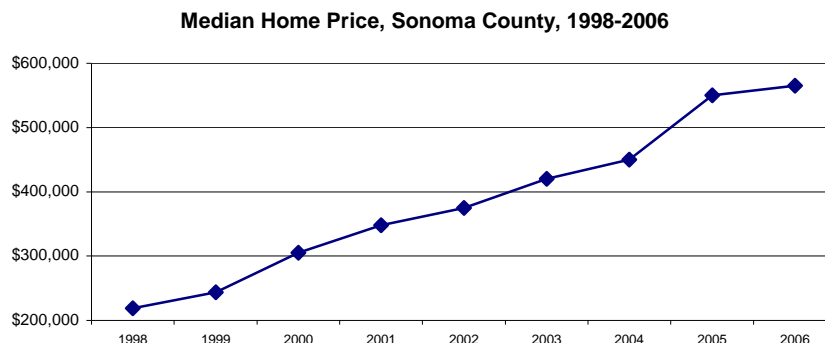
3. Economic Pressure on Low- and Middle-Income Earners

Finding 4: Low- and middle-income families will continue to face increasing economic pressure as living costs increase but wages lag behind.

The high cost of housing in Sonoma County, as well as nationwide increases in the cost of health care, health insurance, gasoline, and other necessities, is hitting low and middle income families particularly hard, given national statistics showing that their wages are flat or declining. This dual trend is eroding low and middle-income families' ability to afford to live in Sonoma County. It will also continue to drive an increasing demand for some County programs (e.g. food stamps and housing programs), and will negatively impact the County's ability to recruit staff.

Housing costs in Sonoma County have risen dramatically over the past eight years and given overall Bay Area housing factors, can be expected to increase further over the five-year strategic planning horizon. As the chart below shows, since 1998 – less than a decade – Sonoma County's median

home price has gone from just over \$200,000 to nearly \$600,000.¹⁸ Increases of this magnitude have driven up the price of an entry-level home beyond the means of many low-middle income first-time homebuyers.



For those who rent their dwellings, prices have also increased, however not as dramatically. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom unit in Sonoma County rose from \$795 in 1995 to \$1,154 in 2005, an increase of 45%.¹⁹

In addition, costs for energy, gasoline, health care, and other necessities are on the rise nationally. At the same time, wages for low- and middle-income wage earners have remained flat or declined, according to numerous studies of Sonoma County, Bay Area, and national trends.²⁰ A study of earners in Sonoma County showed that incomes for lower-wage earners grew at a pace similar to that of high-wage earners in the 1980's, but fell significantly behind in the 1990's when the incomes of the wealthiest segment rose by 24%. Lower wage earners grew by only 4%.²¹ A 1995 study of the Bay Area found that between 1995 and 2000 wages for the top wage earners rose 18.7%, while for the lowest-paid workers they declined by 0.2%.²²

As a result, low- and middle-income families in Sonoma County face increasing economic pressure, and those seeking to buy their first home will increasingly be forced to look outside of Sonoma County to find affordable housing.

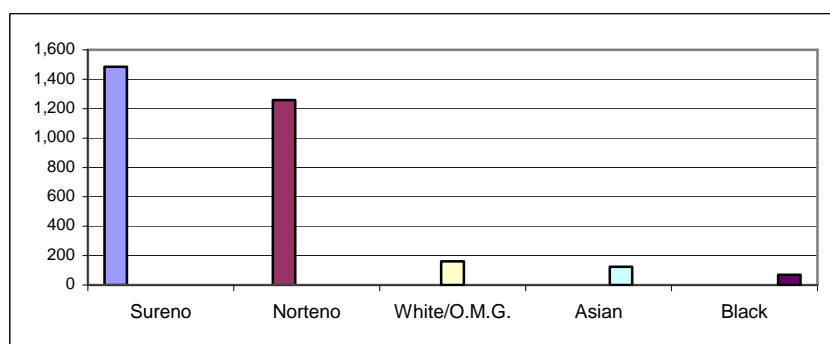
Greatest Impact on County Services: The need for affordable housing greatly exceeds the public and private sector's ability to provide it, driving increasing demand for limited housing subsidies and other housing programs offered through the County. However, the cost of housing will have secondary consequences. For example, as housing costs increase more rapidly than County wages, this will become an increasingly negative factor in the County's ability to recruit staff. On the other hand, to the extent that properties are reassessed over time, increasing property values tend to increase revenues to the County. Also, overall economic pressure on low- and middle-income earners is a factor in increasing demand for services, including Medi-Cal, which grew from about 5,000 recipients in 1990 to over 20,000 recipients in 2005 (though some of this growth came about from policy changes that have expanded eligibility).²³

4. Gang Activity

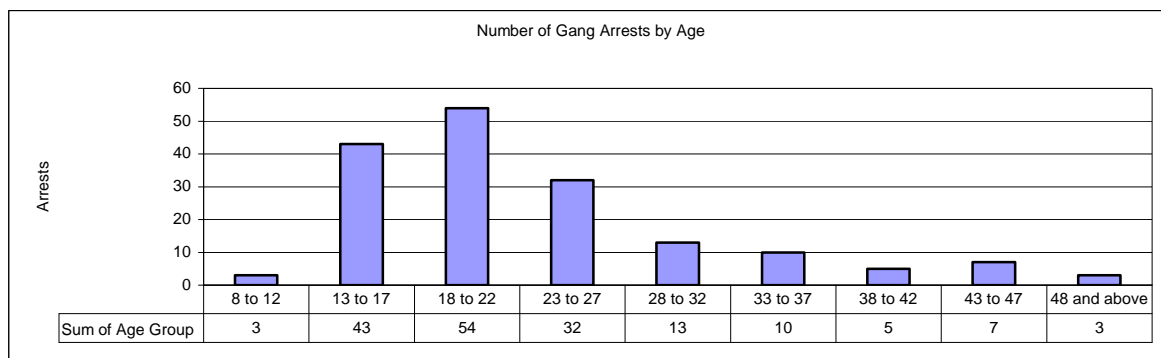
Finding 5: Gang activity will continue to increase, placing a heavy burden on the criminal justice system.

Gang membership continues to grow rapidly, particularly in Latino-identified gangs, placing an increasingly heavy burden on resources in law enforcement, the courts, and juvenile and adult detention facilities.

Gang membership and activity is present in the White, Asian, and African American communities, but is particularly prevalent in the Latino community. The following chart shows known membership in gangs in Sonoma County as of April of 2006, illustrating that the two Latino gangs constitute the greatest majority by far.²⁴



The following chart shows that the vast majority of gang members are youth between age 13 and 22, with the next-largest segment between age 23 and 27.²⁵



It is widely recognized that gang activity has been an increasing problem in Sonoma County, as evidenced by articles in the press and reports from interviews with Sonoma County staff and community experts undertaken as part of this strategic planning project. This perception is supported by the following statistics: In just three years the number of gang-conditioned sentences in Juvenile Court more than doubled – from 145 cases in 2002 to 385 in 2005. Also, between 2002 and 2005, the total number of adult gang-related cases increased by more than 45%, and the number of felony cases rose by over 55%.²⁶

Greatest Impact on County Services: Gang members represent a significant portion of the population in the criminal justice system. One indicator of this is a survey in April 2006, in which 26% of inmates were associated with gangs.²⁷ Gang-related crimes tend to be both more serious and more complex (for example, there are often multiple offenders involved in each crime). This places a disproportionate burden on law enforcement, detention facilities, the district attorney, public defender, and other criminal justice functions. Also, gang-affiliated inmates create a management challenge for detention facilities because of higher security requirements and the need to separate members of different gangs from each other.

5. Alcohol and Methamphetamine Abuse

Finding 6: The County's high rates of alcohol and meth abuse will continue to have a major impact on the overall demand for County services.

Alcohol and other Drugs (AOD) in General. Arrests related to AOD constituted nearly half of the total bookings in Sonoma County detention facilities in 1995, and this does not include other crime categories that are likely influenced by AOD, such as violent crime, property crime, and sex crimes. Inmates convicted of AOD crimes often are sentenced to residential treatment after completing their incarceration, and on a single day in December of 2005, 92 inmates were awaiting AOD treatment beds, of whom 33 had completed their sentence and could immediately have left the jail but for the fact that no appropriate treatment facility was available. Mental health issues in the criminal justice system are indicated by the fact that the average number of mentally ill inmates with a "code Z" classification (able to be housed with the general population but requiring medical treatment) increased eightfold between 1998 and 2005 (increasing from about 14 in 1998 to 118 in the first ten months of 2005).²⁸

Alcohol: The prevalence of alcohol abuse in Sonoma County is indicated by the fact that the county's rates of the following all exceed statewide averages:

- fatalities from alcohol related traffic accidents,
- teen drinking and marijuana use,
- adult and youth admissions to alcohol and drug treatment programs,
- juvenile arrests for alcohol and other drug (AOD) offenses,
- school AOD offenses,
- and other indicators.²⁹

Also, a significant number of children in Sonoma County are born exposed to alcohol or drugs prenatally.³⁰

Methamphetamine use in society in general is difficult to quantify, but its prevalence is indicated by two indicators. One is the number of people in alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment programs, and the other is the number of methamphetamine addicts in the criminal justice system. According to both of these indicators, Sonoma County has a high rate of methamphetamine use. Methamphetamine use is the second most common primary drug – following alcohol – of abuse among those admitted for AOD treatment in Sonoma County, and those treatment programs contain a higher percentage of methamphetamine abusers than the state and national averages.³¹ Also, methamphetamine use prior to arrest is reported by 60% of the inmate population.³²

Greatest Impact on County Services: AOD problems constitute a significant direct demand on many county programs and services, particularly in the criminal justice and health services arenas. AOD

use also drives broader social problems, such as unemployment and homelessness, that have a significant impact on society in general and on the demand for many County services.

6. Increasing Demand for County Services

Finding 7: The demand for County services will increase at a far greater rate than County population growth in several program areas where there is a significant share of County costs. The increasing service demand, combined with reimbursements not fully covering costs, create significant challenges to the County's ability to maintain service levels.

The six trends described above, along with other factors, combine to drive up demand and costs, particularly as they relate to the criminal justice system. The costs of Criminal Justice Services consume the largest share of the County's discretionary General Fund revenue, and these costs are rising far faster than population growth – from 1996 to 2004 the population increased by 11%, but Criminal Justice Department costs have increased over 100% (though largely due to salary and benefits cost increases, see Work Group 1 Report, Finding 1). These increases are driven in part by rising gang activity, which has driven up the number of offenders per case, placing a greater burden throughout the criminal justice process (from arrests, to prosecution, to publicly-funded defense, to incarceration). An example of high demand growth in Human Services is in-home care for people with disabilities and the frail elderly which has grown from about 29,000 recipients in 2001 to about 43,000 in 2005 (an increase of nearly 50%), and the County's share of program costs nearly tripled during that time. Alcohol and drug abuse affects both the criminal justice system (from AOD arrests to treatment programs in detention facilities) and Health and Child Protective Services. The County's costs for treatment programs increased from \$4.9 million in FY 2000-01 to \$6.4 million in 2005-06, as the County made an ever-greater commitment to these programs in the face of funding cuts at the federal and state level.

Demand for services and service-delivery costs are driven by many factors, including:

- Growth in the general population over time (even Sonoma County's slow steady growth has a significant impact over a five to ten year timeframe).
- Growth in specific sub-populations that heavily utilize certain County services (for example, the elderly).
- Changing economic conditions (for example, rapidly rising housing prices increase demand for County housing programs).
- Changing social conditions (for example, growth in the abuse of alcohol and drugs drives increasing demand for law enforcement, treatment services and child protective services).
- Changing federal and state policy (for example, in many County-delivered services, the federal and state governments have shifted a greater share of costs to the County).

Criminal Justice

The costs of Criminal Justice Services consumed the largest share of the County's discretionary General Fund revenue, and these costs are rising far faster than population growth – from 1996 to 2004 the population increased by 11%, but Criminal Justice department costs have increased over 100%, largely due to rapidly increasing salary and benefits costs. (For more information, see Work Group 1 Report, p. 5.) While rising crime rates are a factor, more significant are the increasing number of offenders involved in crimes, and the seriousness of those crimes. For example, while bookings for violent crimes in general have remained fairly constant, homicide bookings have increase dramatically. Between 1995 and 2000, bookings for homicide averaged about 20 per year,

but rose to 37 per year between 2001 and 2005 – an 82% increase. The January 2006 “County of Sonoma Adult Detention Planning Staff Report” states that:

It should be noted that the number of homicides has not increased dramatically, but the number of defendants booked for those crimes has. A detailed analysis has not been done, but discussion with the Sheriff's Department and others indicate that the increase in bookings is probably due to multiple defendant homicides, some of which are gang-related ... the impact on detention housing is significant because these inmates require maximum security and stay in jail a long time during homicide trials.³³

This increase in the number of offenders involved in serious crimes impacts most segments of the criminal justice system – law enforcement, public defender, district attorney, and incarceration facilities.

Also, a significant number of Sonoma County residents with mental health issues (MH) or alcohol and other drug problems (AOD) enter the criminal justice system. As is the case statewide, cutbacks in federal and state funding for treatment programs has resulted in a growing number of people going untreated. When these people create a public disturbance or exhibit other criminal behavior, they enter the criminal justice system and, if incarcerated, require housing and treatment programs that are far more costly than incarceration of the average inmate.

As noted above (see Finding 5), AOD bookings constitute nearly half of the total bookings in Sonoma County detention facilities – 48% in 2005. This does not include other crime categories that are likely influenced by AOD use/abuse, such as violent crime, property crime, and sex crimes. In addition, Methamphetamine use prior to arrest is reported by 60% of the inmate population.^{34,35} Inmates convicted of AOD crimes often are sentenced to residential treatment after completing their incarceration, and on a single day in December of 2005, 92 inmates were awaiting AOD treatment beds, of whom 33 had completed their sentence and could immediately have left the jail but for the fact that no appropriate treatment facility was available. Mental health issues in the criminal justice system are indicated by the fact that the average number of mentally ill inmates with a “code Z” classification (able to be housed with the general population but requiring medical treatment) increased eightfold between 1998 and 2005 (increasing from about 14 in 1998 to 118 in the first ten months of 2005).³⁶

Human Services

Demand for the following programs is increasing at a far greater rate than County population growth. Costs to provide these services are also increasing, in some cases dramatically. The following are examples of rapid demand and cost growth (note that in some cases state funding offsets some County costs, but it falls short of the overall cost increases from year to year).

- In-Home Supportive Services, which allows the frail elderly and people with disabilities to live independently in their own homes rather than in more expensive institutional care settings, has grown from about 2,500 recipients in 2001 to about 4,000 in 2006 (an increase of over 60%). At the same time, the County's share of cost for the program has nearly tripled – from about \$3.5 million to over \$10 million.
- In the foster care program, caseloads have remained fairly constant from 2001 to 2005 (at about 5,500 children), but during that time the County's share of costs have escalated from \$4.9 million to \$6.4 million (a 30% increase). This has been caused by a shift in funding from the federal and state levels to the County, as well as increasing costs of care per child (which in turn has been caused by a number of factors, notably a lack of available County-licensed foster parents causing children to be placed in more

expensive placements). Generally, youth leaving the foster care system at age 18 have relatively high rates of unemployment or underemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, and other “at risk” factors that can lead to further demand and cost increases in other programs.

- Adult Protective Services referrals increased from about 1,500 in 2001 to about 1,800 in 2005. While this rate of growth is greater than the population as a whole, it is indicative of the growth in the senior population that this program serves.

Other Areas

Most other County services will experience growth in demand for services as a result of overall population growth. In addition, County functional areas will experience growth in demand as a result of the trends described above and other factors. The following paragraphs summarize the major impacts on each of these functional areas.

Development Services: Major residential development will occur primarily in the urban growth areas. The County can expect to continue experiencing a decline in the number of permits and other direct-service requests. However, workload is increasing in some areas because of increasing regulation. Also, as the growing affluent population and rural-area-residents express greater resistance to projects like vineyards, wineries, and resorts, the County spends more time-per-project to hear and address public concerns, as evidenced by recent hearings on stream setbacks policy.

Infrastructure: The County’s major infrastructure systems are examined in the Work Group 3 report.

Administrative Departments continue to be impacted by increasingly onerous state and federal directives and compliance requirements. Included in these are specific data-collection and reporting procedures. These factors cause increased workloads, complexity, and costs. Funding levels do not keep pace with these demands(See Work Group 4 Report).

Human Resources: Like local government entities statewide, the County of Sonoma often lacks qualified candidates to fill vacant positions. This includes middle-management positions and specialized jobs (e.g., law enforcement, licensed health care, engineering, social worker, and librarian positions). Also, the County has difficulty recruiting sufficient numbers of bilingual and bi-cultural employees, which is an increasing concern as the Latino population grows, particularly in the criminal justice and Health and Human Services areas.³⁷ Because of the rising cost of housing, an increasing number of public employees commute from outside the County.

Health Services will be impacted by growing Medi-Cal caseloads (driven by a lack of health insurance among the working poor, increasing economic stress on low-income families, and increasing numbers of indigent elderly in nursing homes), and demand for those health services provided by the County (e.g., communicable disease programs, substance abuse and mental health treatment, nutrition programs, and indigent pregnancy care services).

7. Social Fabric

Finding 8. Sonoma County’s social fabric will continue to trend toward greater diversity, leading to new challenges in service delivery and governance.

While difficult to quantify, most experts agree that Sonoma County’s demographic and social trends over the next five to seven years will increasingly move in the direction of both a growing elderly White population and a growing, younger Latino population. The opportunity to take advantage of

this diversity and build a more cohesive community could positively impact the County's ability to develop a broad-based policy and programmatic consensus to address the issues and needs described above. Taking advantage of this opportunity will require overcoming a number of challenges, including but not limited to: relatively lower rates of civic participation among Latino and low income groups. According to a recent study cited in the Press Democrat (September 18, 2006):

"According to a report by the Public Policy Institute of California, 63% of non-voters are Latino. Two-thirds of them are renters, and 82% have a household income of less than \$60,000 a year. By the same token, likely voters tend to be homeowners (77%), have college degrees (53%) and have household incomes of \$60,000 or more (56%.) In California, whites represent 46% of the population. But at the polls, they represent 70% of voters."

Section 4: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges

The following were identified by the Work Group as the County's most significant strengths and weaknesses, as well as, the greatest challenges and opportunities it faces over the planning horizon.

Strengths of Sonoma County Government:

- Cohesive County leadership that is willing to look at the big picture and tough issues.
- Relative financial strength.
- Several studies and initiatives underway that could address some of the major problems identified above.
- The strategic planning process has developed cross-departmental relationships.
- There is an expressed desire and willingness to develop strategic thinking in and across County departments.
- The County's relatively fiscally conservative budget policies provide some protection during difficult economic times.
- Willingness to take on a leadership role (Board, CAO, Dept. Heads) in many State organizations and associations to tackle issues for all counties and public agencies.
- Knowledgeable employees, and a countywide focus on skill development and education.
- The staff works collaboratively when multiple departments and units must address important community needs and issues
- Some available resources and a willingness to invest in prevention activities that reduce costs later on.

Weaknesses of Sonoma County government:

- Huge cost of employee and retiree benefits that are rapidly escalating.
- Tendency to take a "silo" approach to some problems: e.g. focusing on a unit or department perspective, often driven by the requirements of funding sources that prescribe program approaches or dictate data requirements, hindering an interdisciplinary approach
- Lack of bi-cultural staff.
- Lack of automated systems in comparison to the "quality" systems found in some organizations.
- The need to get through the "Government red tape" to get priorities accomplished.
- Lack of presence in communities outside Santa Rosa (need for out-stationed offices).
- Shortage of treatment resources in Health Services, AOD, Mental Health, that leads to "criminalization" of these populations (which is very costly).

Opportunities Inherent in the External Trends and Conditions:

- Sonoma County is a beautiful place that is a highly desirable destination to visit.
- Interest of other jurisdictions in collaboration, co-location, and contracting.
- Strong non-profit sector in Sonoma County.
- Use visionary, proactive policy to protect/improve quality of life; be proactive in researching best practices re: policy in all fields.

- Momentum re: special initiatives (e.g., Measure O for gang prevention, Measure M for road improvements).
- Trend of community partnerships to develop creative solutions (e.g., SMART train).
- Prevention and early intervention strategies for crime and substance abuse targeted at our youth (e.g., Community Partnerships for youth).
- Public-Private Partnerships, i.e., services; childcare; in-home care; treatment facilities, Valley of the Moon Children's Home.
- Use technology to reduce costs and increase collaboration.
- Where available, use client data across programs to identify "frequent flyers" that repeatedly use multiple County programs.
- Educational partnerships to help our schools better equip youth and address emerging social issues, especially working with schools re: high Latino drop-out rate.
- Use of local educational programs at SRJC and SSU to provide specialized training for our future workforce.
- Emerging leadership in the Latino community, and community activism – opportunity to build collaborations to address needs and issues.

Challenges:

- Balancing development pressures with sound planning needed to maintain/improve quality of life.
- Silos in federal and state funding.
- Increasing regulation and compliance requirements.
- Projected increase in jobs in lower-paying industries (e.g. retail, tourism), combined with high housing costs – challenge of increasing homelessness, in-commuting, and difficulty in recruiting County staff.
- Inter-jurisdictional collaboration is often difficult to achieve and politically and publicly sensitive.
- AOD: our use/abuse rate is above state/national averages.
- Criminal justice and gang costs.
- Public "get tough on crime" mindset accompanied by an unwillingness to fund prison and jail expansion measures.
- Infrastructure needs without concomitant funding.
- Apparently low public appetite for additional special tax funding for government services.
- Finding ways to bridge the increasing gap reflected in demographic trends, i.e., between growing older White and younger Latino populations.

Appendix: Scenarios of the Future

The following scenarios describe Sonoma County from the vantage point of 2010. They were used by the Work Group to help identify both the severity and nature of the likely impacts on County services based on the demographic and other trends described above. Also, they allow the County to think about and prepare for different possible future conditions, using different assumptions about the less predictable trends to create different future scenarios.

The following pages present two major scenarios and two variants to the second scenario:

- Scenario 1. The “status quo” – what Sonoma County will look like if things continue on their current course.
- Scenario 2: How things would be different if the economy and County revenues decline. Within this scenario, an additional dynamic is explored: what happens if the community rallies to solve problems collectively and collaboratively, versus the effect if the community becomes increasingly polarized and contentious.

Scenario One: Straight Ahead to 2010

In 2010, Sonoma County is still viewed as a highly desirable place to visit and live. The “country” atmosphere has been preserved through a combination of public policies (City-centered growth, greenbelts and open space, etc.) and healthy agricultural and tourism sectors. Costs of housing and living continue to be slightly lower than most other Bay Area Counties. Despite issues associated with urbanization and population growth, Sonoma County is still seen as being preferable to many Bay Area and Southern California urban areas as a place to raise a family, attend the public schools, start a business, or retire.

Urbanization and Agriculture: Since 2005, housing supply growth in Sonoma County has been relatively slow (about 1% per year). Countywide, about 2,000 housing units have been added per year, the vast majority in cities. Agriculture continues to dominate the unincorporated landscape. Acreage has continued to be converted to vineyards, which has generally increased the economic return per acre of agricultural land, but also makes the agricultural sector more vulnerable to changes in wine industry market factors.

Costs of Living and Housing: The cost of living in the Bay Area continues to be higher than many other areas of the state and nation. In Sonoma County, housing prices have increased significantly over the past decade (since 2000). The median housing price is expected to continue rising into the future because:

- Housing prices elsewhere in the Bay Area continue to be even higher.
- Sonoma County continues to be a highly desirable place to live. Affluent households, including retirees, continue to move from other parts of the state and nation, purchasing or building high-priced homes.

There continues to be an insufficient supply of affordable housing for low and middle income families seeking to buy their first home, and therefore, an increasing number are leaving Sonoma County to do so. High land and construction costs, which continue to accelerate, are making it increasingly difficult to build “affordable” homes. The lower end of the new housing spectrum consists primarily of higher-density projects in the cities, much of which is multi-family rental. Whether renting or buying, low and middle-income families in Sonoma County are spending a growing portion of their earnings on housing.

Jobs and the Economy: In general, in 2010 the national and Sonoma County economies continue to be relatively healthy, despite the continually rising price of oil and energy. Sonoma County's job creation rate is among the highest 15% of regions in the U.S., notwithstanding the relatively high cost of doing business in the County. The greatest job growth has occurred in Santa Rosa, but the highest rate of growth has been in Windsor and Petaluma.

Nonetheless, much of the job growth has been in relatively lower-paying industry sectors (e.g. leisure and hospitality). There has also been growth in some higher-paying jobs (e.g., in the construction and health care sectors). Government continues to be the largest employer in the County (excluding education, government supplies roughly 15% of jobs). In the private sector, the leading employment sectors continue to be retail, tourism, health services and agriculture. In some cases, employers have difficulty finding workers to fill specialized or high-skilled positions.

Impact on County Functional Areas

Criminal Justice: Since the late 1990's, gang membership has risen at an alarming rate, and gangs have become more sophisticated in both recruitment of new members and in criminal endeavors. This has driven a steady increase in the number of serious crimes, as well as the number of offenders per crime committed. Also, state and federal funding for substance abuse and mental health treatment programs falls ever shorter of public need, continuing the decades-old trend of "criminalizing" these problems (people needing treatment increasingly show up in the criminal justice system). Incarcerated gang members and the mentally ill have special requirements, and thus are more expensive to house in jails than other inmates. As has been true for decades, Criminal Justice Department costs are rising and represent a huge share of the County's budget. From 1975 to 2000, 80% of County construction dollars were spent to build detention and criminal justice facilities.

Health and Human Services: Demand has continued to rise very quickly for many Health and Human Services programs, some of which have a high County share-of-cost. Examples include the In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program, which provides in-home aides to help frail seniors and the disabled to live independently in their own homes rather than in more expensive institutional care settings, grew rapidly between 2001 and 2005 (increasing from about 2,500 to about 4,000 recipients) and has continued to grow in both cost and size in the five years since 2005. Also, the foster care system has continued to experience significant cost growth, as it did in the early 2000's. In mental health services and programs for alcohol and other drug treatment, long-standing trends of increasing demand and costs have continued, while state and federal funding for these programs has continued to fall short.

Other Programs and Needs: Demographic changes have impacted the County. For example, population growth over the long term. The population is aging. Poor public health behaviors are emerging, and the economic stress of low and middle wage earners living in this high-cost County is increasing. However, unlike the programs mentioned above that have significant costs per recipient, the impact of these demographic factors on County programs and departments is primarily a need for additional staffing at increasing costs. Also, many County departments are struggling (and often unable) to find bi-cultural employees to serve the growing Latino population.

Employee Benefits: Another rising cost factor has been employee and retiree benefits (See Work Group 1, p. 3).

Roads: County-maintained roads have continued to deteriorate. Five years ago, in 2006, nearly half of the 1,000 miles of more rural, minor roads were deemed structurally defective and could barely be

maintained in passable condition. Now, in 2011, nearly two-thirds are crumbling.. The County's 450 miles of major roads are experiencing increasing traffic (in part because commuters use them as alternatives to the congested major highways), and federal and state funds are falling far short of costs to maintain and expand them.

Water, Wastewater, and Solid Waste: The solid waste disposal system is tenable, and although costs to transport garbage to other Bay Area locations have risen somewhat, this is a minor factor in the overall system. Water supply is holding out, given that the County has been able to secure adequate water rights, and water transmission systems have been able to be maintained such that service is reliable throughout the year in most areas of the County - summer peak demand causes problems in a few areas. However, the cost of maintaining the water system, driven largely by upgrading of aging facilities and increasing federal/state regulatory impacts, has driven up rates to users. The same is generally true for County-operated wastewater systems ; capacity has been maintained, although sometimes requiring significant investments that have impacted rates. However, looking out to the end of this decade, to 2019, population growth and aging infrastructure will cause water supply and water and wastewater systems to face serious issues that will need to be addressed if service disruption is to be avoided.

Scenario Two: Bad Economic News

In this scenario, funding for County government services in 2010 has diminished significantly. This has been driven primarily by declining funding from the federal and state levels, as well as a moderate downturn in the national and local economies driven by rising interest rates, escalating energy costs, and other factors. Sonoma County home prices have declined moderately, reducing growth in property tax revenue. Resources are also scarce for the Sonoma County cities, the non-profit organizations, and others providing services to the community, which drives reductions in service levels and closure or consolidation of programs or both.

Health care costs have marched upward with annual double-digit increases over the last 5 years (since 2005), causing many Sonoma County employers to reduce or eliminate health benefits, placing an ever greater burden on employees whose wages are not rising significantly in this poor economy. For the County of Sonoma, the number of employees who have retired in the past five years compounds the rising health care costs. Together, these two trends have diverted a growing portion of County funds away from programs to cover the cost of employee and retiree benefits. The cost of oil and electricity have also continued rising rapidly, driving up the County's operating costs.

Seeing a decline in overall levels of government services, Californians are increasingly using the initiative process to fund specific programs. This has focused resources on some service areas at the expense of others. Citizens are frustrated with government, but at the same time, often ask more from public institutions and demand greater accountability for the use of tax dollars.

Impact on County Functional Areas

County-Wide Impacts

Many Departments are impacted by rising rates of unemployment, poverty, and homelessness. People earning low and moderate incomes, who often use a range of County services, face increasing economic hardship as ever-greater portions of their earnings goes to the cost of living. The well-to-do in the County continue to have high expectations of government and are active in pursuing them (from participation in government process to litigation against the County).

Specific Impacts on County Functional Areas

Health and Human Services: Federal and State program cuts and consolidation span all Health and Human Services areas, and programs continue to explore creative funding options. At the same time, rising rates of poverty, homelessness, and economic pressure on low and middle income earners is driving significant increases in demand for HHS services. In addition, the economic downturn and the accompanying shortage of entry-level jobs could put the County at risk of not meeting federal performance measures in the “welfare to work” program and thus, putting pressure on the General Fund to fill the funding gaps created by assessed penalties.

Criminal Justice: Increases in homelessness, alcoholism, and drug addiction have made these populations more visible to the public, increasing the demand for law enforcement to “do something.” In addition, gangs have become very sophisticated in their recruitment efforts of our youth with the lure of money, friendship, a sense of belonging and protection. This increasing gang population coupled with the seriousness of their criminal behavior also increases the public’s expectations and demands for law enforcement intervention to protect the community. Further shrinkage in community mental health programs has increased the presence of this population in the criminal justice system. Law enforcement resources are more limited due to reduced federal and state funding for specific programs and County and city budget problems, yet demand for services has increased. Local law enforcement agencies have been forced to prioritize how they will respond to calls for service based on the severity of the reported offense, response times have grown, and some calls go unanswered, deteriorating the public’s trust in local government’s ability to protect them!

Development and Infrastructure: The downturn in the economy has decreased development activity and reduced permit fee revenues. As a result of the downturn, the growth in demand for water and wastewater systems has slowed somewhat, but the County still struggles to fund needed maintenance and to build capacity to accommodate continuing population growth. Road maintenance and repairs are decreasing due to lack of funding, causing roads to worsen at an increasingly rapid pace. Capital projects are limited to the most critical health and safety issues. Funding for operations and maintenance of County Regional Parks is redirected toward funding high-priority health and safety programs, resulting in limited park access and reduced public amenities.

Administration: Lack of hiring in other sectors and the County’s history of providing relative job stability has improved the County’s competitiveness in hiring. However, available funding for annual salary and benefit increases is minimal or non-existent, and staff reductions are necessary to operate within available resources. This combination causes the remaining employees to work harder to provide the same level of service with a reduced compensation package. There is an increase in morale problems and union issues.

Variation B-1. Everyone Builds Higher Fences

In response to the economic conditions described above, government and non-profit organizations are scrambling for limited resources. Where collaboration existed in the past, it has broken down as small amounts of funding can mean survival for individual programs. Because of federal and state policies, as well as initiatives passed in California, funding streams are frequently targeted to narrow service segments and prescribed service delivery models. This not only limits collaboration, but has also required programs to eliminate positions, often at the same time as new positions open in different programs or categories. As a result of this high staff turnover, in addition to a wave of retirements, local government and non-profits have lost many of their most experienced and knowledgeable people. Informal connections and networks have broken down, further fanning the flames of competition. This has led to inefficiency and duplication in service delivery. The public’s

frustration grows as people find familiar programs and people gone, and experience difficulty in finding how to get the services they expect from local government. In turn, there is little public support for tax increases, fundraising requests, or appeals for the community to volunteer or support the work of government and non-profit agencies. This drives a downward spiral as more programs shut down, more positions are lost, and the public experiences even greater frustration and unmet need for services.

Variation B-2 All Join Hands

In response to the economic conditions described above, government and non-profit organizations have come together, led by the County of Sonoma, to jointly plan programs, identify the most efficient ways to deliver services, and collaborate to attract additional funding. The County contracts with Cities to provide services when their costs are lower or service delivery is more effective, and vice versa. The County and its local-government partners have worked with non-profit agencies to build service-provision networks. As an added benefit of this approach, non-profits themselves work more collaboratively and efficiently, maximizing the results achieved with available funds. While some experienced people have been lost to retirement and program closures, the County and its partners have focused on hiring new staff with skills and experience in inter-agency collaborative approaches. Often new faces have achieved greater collaboration because they lack any history of mistrust or competitiveness. Stories regularly appear in local media, and occasionally in the national media, highlighting collaborative efforts among Sonoma County and other local entities as models for the rest of the state and nation. This, combined with the success in attracting funds and meeting community needs, has boosted employee morale and motivated people to come to work for Sonoma County and its local-agency partners. It has also fed an upward spiral of success breeding success as federal and state agencies, as well as philanthropists throughout the region, choose to provide funding for the innovative, collaborative, and cost-effective programs operated by Sonoma County and its partner agencies.

End Notes

¹ Data and chart provided by Sonoma County Economic Development Board.

² Data provided by Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department and Sonoma County Economic Development Board.

³ Based on information provided in interviews with staff from the Sonoma County Economic Development Board, the Sonoma County Community Development Commission, and Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department.

⁴ Information provided by Sonoma County Health and Human Services Departments and from “65+ in the United States: 2005,” U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Census Bureau, 2005. Note that while disability rates increase with age, and thus seniors experience higher rates of disability than younger people, today’s seniors are staying healthy longer and experiencing lower rates of disability than same-age seniors in the past. However, given the aging population and that people are living longer, the total number of seniors with disabilities can be expected to grow significantly.

⁵ Data provided by Sonoma County Economic Development Board; “Living Longer, Living Well,” Sonoma County Human Services Department, 2005; and “65+ in the United States: 2005,” U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

⁶ Data provided by Sonoma County Department of Health Services.

⁷ “Trends and educational disparities in functional capacity among people aged 65–84 years,” International Journal of Epidemiology, August 2006.

⁸ Information provided in interviews with several Sonoma County Department heads, as well as staff in PRMD.

⁹ California Department of Finance, population projections, 2006, as cited in “Strategic Planning Available Data,” produced by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services.

¹⁰ California Department of Finance, population projections, 2006, as cited in “Strategic Planning Available Data,” produced by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services.

¹¹ California Department of Finance, population projections, 2006, as cited in “Strategic Planning Available Data,” produced by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services.

¹² “Sonoma County Change,” Chuck Robbins, Santa Rosa Junior College Economic Development, October 2005

¹³ The Press Democrat, July 24, 2005, as cited in “Sonoma County Change,” Chuck Robbins, Santa Rosa Junior College Economic Development, October 2005.

¹⁴ Sonoma County Office of Education, “Sonoma County High School Trends – Class of 2005,” Carl Wong, Ed.D.”

¹⁵ Business Week Online, March 2005

¹⁶ Conditions in the Latino community compiled from multiple sources, including interviews and recent articles in the local press.

¹⁷ Data provided by Sonoma County Economic Development Board.

¹⁸ Data provided by Sonoma County Economic Development Board.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Fair Market Rent data established for the Section 8 rental assistance program, data for 1995 and 2005.

²⁰ For example: (1) “The Limits of Prosperity: Growth, Inequality, and Poverty in the North Bay,” New Economy, Working Solutions (NEWS), March, 2005, and (2) “Poverty in California: Moving Beyond the Federal Measure,” Public Policy Institute of California, May, 2006, and (3) “Rich Man, Poor Man,” Editorial, U.S. News and World Report, June 12, 2006.

²¹ “Study: Income Gap Grows in Sonoma County,” The Press Democrat, March 1, 2005.

²² “Boom Fueled Pay Disparity,” The Press Democrat, December 13, 2005.

²³ “Caseload Growth in Medi-Cal and Non-Assistance Food Stamps” chart provided by the Human Services Department.

²⁴ “Sonoma County District Attorney Critical Needs Assessment,” February, 2006.

²⁵ Data provided by the Sheriff’s Department from the Bi-Monthly Gang Summary Statistics Report, Between March 1 and April 30, 2006.

²⁶ From the February, 2006 “Sonoma County District Attorney Critical Needs Assessment”: In 2002, 145 “gang sentencing conditions” were ordered by the Sonoma County juvenile magistrate at Los Guilicos for any juvenile offenders. A “gang condition” is a sentence condition which restricts the juvenile offender from participating in

any gang activity. By 2005, however, the “gang conditions” had nearly tripled – there were 385 convicted juvenile offenders with “gang conditions” as part of their sentences, an increase of 165.5%.

²⁷ Population Overview – MADF and MCDF, April 6, 2006, p. 2.

²⁸ “County of Sonoma Adult Detention Planning Staff Report,” January 2006.

²⁹ “Sonoma County SB 697 Needs Assessment,” Casey J. Morigan, 2005, and “Community Indicators of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Risk – Sonoma County 2004,” prepared for the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs by the Center for Applied Research Solutions, and data provided by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services.

³⁰ Data provided by Sonoma County Department of Health Services.

³¹ “Sonoma County Methamphetamine Profile – Report to the Board of Supervisors” July, 2006.

³² In April 2006, the jail medical provider conducted a random review of the medical charts of 402 inmates, revealing 240 cases (60%) with self-disclosed methamphetamine use (for context, it is noteworthy that self-reporting can generally be expected to result in under-reporting).

³³ “County of Sonoma Adult Detention Planning Staff Report,” January 2006.

³⁴ In April 2006, the jail medical provider conducted a random review of the medical charts of 402 inmates, revealing 240 cases (60%) with self-disclosed methamphetamine use.

³⁵ For further information on Methamphetamine use in Sonoma County, see the “Sonoma County Methamphetamine Profile – Report to the Board of Supervisors” July, 2006.

³⁶ “County of Sonoma Adult Detention Planning Staff Report,” January 2006 .

³⁷ Sonoma County Bilingual Survey, provided by Sonoma County Human Resources Department, December 2005.